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C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 001018

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CU](#) [CA](#) [UNCHR](#)

SUBJECT: CANADA-CUBA: FOREIGN MINISTER STRONGLY PROTESTS  
TRIALS OF CUBAN OPPOSITION MEMBERS

REF: A. OTTAWA 00964 B. STATE 86002 C. OTTAWA 00897

[1](#)D. STATE 75175

Classified By: Pol MC Brian Flora for reasons 1.5(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) On April 7, Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Bill Graham called in Cuba's ambassador to Canada to formally protest the recent arrests and trials of Cuban opposition members. According to Louise Branch, DFAIT's Deputy Director for Central America and Cuba, who was present at the meeting, Minister Graham told Ambassador Fernandez de Cossio Dominguez that the prison sentences imposed on opposition members were beyond comprehension, and that the government of Cuba was making a colossal error. Minister Graham also gave the ambassador a letter for Cuban Minister of Foreign Relations Felipe Roque in which Graham expressed Canada's extreme concern about the curtailment of human rights and freedom of expression in Cuba.

[1](#)2. (C) Branch told poloff on April 8th that Canada's ambassador in Havana had made an official request to the government of Cuba, before the trials began, for a list of those arrested, the charges against them, and the rationale behind the charges. The Canadian ambassador also asked that a Canadian embassy representative be allowed to attend the trials. The Cuban government refused these requests on the basis that the persons on trial were not Canadian citizens, and further explained that no diplomatic representatives would be allowed to attend the trials. In his letter to the Cuban foreign minister, Minister Graham expressed profound disappointment in this decision by the Cuban government.

[1](#)3. (C) Branch said that Ambassador Dominguez defended his government's actions during the meeting, asserting that opposition members were not arrested for exercising their freedom of expression, but because they were counter-revolutionaries working with the U.S. The ambassador referred to the arrests and trials as a national security matter for Cuba. Minister Graham specifically mentioned a prison sentence of 25 years imposed on one of the opposition members, saying this was more in line with a sentence for murder. According to Branch, the Cuban ambassador responded that, no, 30 years was the usual sentence imposed for murder in Cuba. Branch said that Ambassador Dominguez complained about Principal Officer Cason during the meeting, stating that Cason is openly encouraging dissent but Cuba can't expel him because it would mean the loss of the migratory agreement.

[1](#)4. (C) With reference to the Cuba resolution in the U.N. Human Rights Commission (which Canada intends to co-sponsor), Branch confirmed that Canada's delegation wants tougher language, and wants the arrests mentioned specifically. She further indicated that Canada has begun promoting the idea of a stronger resolution with other UNCHR delegations, particularly the Latin American delegations.

KELLY